

POPULATION STUDIES IN EDINBURGH.

In connection with the research work being carried on by the Research Committee in London efforts have been made from time to time to carry on detached work in other parts of the country on lines similar to those adopted for the main part of the work.

These detached investigations were intended, not only to afford information as to conditions in the areas concerned, but also to provide a "control" for the general work.

In the autumn of 1925 through the generosity of the Trustees of the Henderson Trust, work was commenced in the City of Edinburgh. It was understood that this was to be a trial investigation for a very brief period.

The investigation was to be comparable, as far as may be, to that which has been carried on for so many years in London, and it may be of interest to record the methods used and facts collected during the short time the investigation lasted. It was desired to find out the incidence of:

- (1) Receipt of Poor Law Relief and other forms of public assistance;
- (2) Mental Deficiency;
- (3) Lunacy;
- (4) Criminality;
- (5) Epilepsy
- (6) Tuberculosis;
- (7) Infant Mortality;
- (8) Blindness;
- (9) Deafness and Dumbness;
- (11) Social Position of Parents, as witnessed by payment of Income Tax, personal achievements, etc.
- (12) Superior Intelligence—scholarships, prizes, supplementary classes, or evening schools attendance;

and though under the circumstances the investigation could only last a few months, it necessitated as many preliminary steps as one spread over as many years. All facts obtained from the families visited had to be verified from records, and this implied obtaining from various authorities permission to look up the written records. The Medical Officer of Health, the Medical Officer of the Infant Welfare Department, the Chief Constable, the Chief Clerk to the Parish Council, the various charitable organisations, all very kindly granted permission and help was readily given in searching the records.

As it was desired that the samples studied should be taken from the normal working-class population, we were able to use as the start-

ing point of each family a child visited in the course of a very extended inquiry recently made by the Child Life Committee of the Medical Research Council, during which inquiry about one thousand families of the working-class in Edinburgh were visited. The wage-earners of these families were mainly semi-skilled and unskilled workers, with wages under £3 weekly, living in the poorer and more congested quarters of the city. The Child Life Investigation did not enter into the question of heredity at all, though details as to the health, habits and place of birth of the parents were recorded. Permission was given to use the books of the Child-Life Investigation and details found in them which had any bearing on the scope of the Eugenics inquiry.

In order to take a random sample of the Edinburgh population of this class, the 9th, 49th, 89th etc. families of the Child Life Investigation were taken, thus selecting no particular district or class of worker. As the time at disposal was so short, families where information as to one or both of the parents would be impossible or very difficult to collect, were put aside. In this way we rejected five families. In two cases the child originally visited was illegitimate and the father unknown; in one case the mother had died and the children were all adopted by different friends; in another both parents were Poles; while in the fifth, the family had left Edinburgh, probably to go back to the West of Scotland, where both parents were born.

The method employed was first to visit the family, collect as many particulars as possible as to relatives—collaterals and ancestors—on both sides, then visit such of these as were resident in the city.

In all nine starting-point families were taken comprising about 700 persons. One rather striking fact is that of these 9 families only 5 were those of parents both born in Edinburgh—Leith. In one the father came from Manchester; in the other 3 one or both parents had migrated from the surrounding country. Particulars were given of 95 deaths in infancy or miscarriages—certainly not an overstatement. In five of the families 27 persons had had pecuniary assistance from various sources, in four families no record was found of assistance through any city organisation (it was not found possible to look up any country record of any kind). In only one family was there any record of insanity and that only in one member; the same with blindness. Of only three families was there any police-court record, and two of the three records were only for childish misdemeanours (football in street, etc.) The health records showed tuberculosis in three families, but only one confirmed case in each, but of course compulsory notification is very recent. No cases of mental deficiency could be found,—no children from any of the related families were in Special Schools or under the care of the committee for such cases. On the plus side there were at least three cases of people paying income-tax, and over a score of people who had attended supplementary classes, or evening school and had taken prizes. No family is without some record of war service, and in most there is a very noticeable amount.

The difficulties attending such work are very great and it may be of value to indicate what an amount (in practice) of difficult visiting is entailed. Further in our group, which is one well above the lowest strata it will be seen that much searching of records goes to the verifi-

cation of negative statements, i.e. that no criminality, no pauperism, no mental defect exists in such and such a group.

Unless statements made as to age, name, name of wife, address at different times, etc., are fairly accurate, it is almost impossible to obtain verification by written records of pauperism or disease, and generally several visits to any one branch of the family are necessary before lists are complete enough to be verified. One great difficulty was to get the exact number of the houses of relatives; one is often told: "I don't remember the number, but I can go to the house." In Edinburgh where the old houses are often 7 flats high and where there may be as many as four different one and two-roomed houses on each flat, much time was spent inquiring for a certain family at, say No. 187, when it really lived at No. 185 or 189. Another point which took up much time was obtaining particulars of the father's family; quite often, even when one paid a visit in the evening, the father was out, while he might not have a sister in the city from whom details could have been got. As only related families must be visited, it follows that much time may be wasted when no one is found at home. This was specially the case in Christmas and New Year weeks when over 40 unavailing calls were made in all quarters of the city. Then too as this was a "normal" sample of the population, many days were spent in looking up records without obtaining any particulars, as quite a large proportion of the families show no distinction on either the plus or the minus side.

It is impossible to speak of the "result" of an investigation such as this after so brief a period of work. The sum of money available was sufficient to provide an investigator for only a few months. During that time the foundation of the work was laid, which in itself takes long and lays the foundation for any amount of subsequent investigation. Much useful information has been recorded and the outline of seven promising pedigrees prepared. In none of these, however, was it possible in the time available to prepare the work in such detail as to warrant publication. For the same reason, and because the number is so small, it is not possible to draw any general conclusion, except to say this; that if this is a fair example of the Edinburgh population, that population is much more migratory in character than is the population of East London. An examination of the pedigrees shows that a great deal of useful information relative to the incidence and distribution of social failure can be obtained by the use of these methods.

Reference to the data now available of the "Child Life Investigation" (1) will indicate the type of family originally taken for that work. Welfare centres do not touch the very lowest—they can rarely be persuaded to come to a centre at all, and they certainly never attend regularly. From this it emerges that this small Edinburgh group is comparable with the London "Control Group" belonging to the same parish as the pauper group, but taken at random from the normal elementary school population. The incidence of "minus" social qualities compares easily with that in East London, but the "plus" qualities such as unusual intellectual attainments, payment of income-tax appears to be high, and it makes one very curious to learn from

further work whether this indication will turn out to give a clue to the existence of general high level of mental activity in the Scottish artisan as against the London semi-skilled.

The small Pimlico sample published by the Save the Children Fund was as migratory as the Edinburgh group. (2)

It would be necessary, however, in order to give to the data statistical validity adequate for comparison with other centres, to extend the work so as to embrace at least fifty families, each studied in such detail as to complete the information, sociological and racial, within two degrees of kinship of the parents of the chosen child. The Research Committee estimate that such a research could be completed within two years were funds made available for fieldwork and the supervision provided by the Research Committee in London.

1. Special Reports, M.R.C. No. 101.
2. "Child Life in Westminster," Save the Children Fund.